

Notes on the Temple of Onias at Leontopolis

ABRAHAM WASSERSTEIN

Rabbinic literature written in Hebrew and Aramaic is a largely untapped source for the history of the ancient world. Here and there it has been used with some measure of success for the critical reconstruction of literary, legal and—to some extent—social history of ancient Jewry in Babylonia, Palestine and some adjoining regions by, e.g., Gedalya Alon, Saul Lieberman and, more recently, Martin Goodman. But, on the whole, the difficulties inherent in the sources seem to have deterred ancient historians from systematically examining and exploiting for their purposes what is one of the largest bodies of literature surviving from antiquity. The reasons for that are varied: There are superstitious fears about linguistic difficulties and superstitious delusions no less unjustified and deceptive about the allegedly narrow range of rabbinic literature. One glance at the works of learned scholars like Paul de Lagarde and Eduard Schwartz suffices to make one aware of the loss of opportunities due not only to prejudice, animosity and, occasionally, wilful and hence invincible ignorance, but to a general lack of awareness of the breadth and depth of the materials to be found in the records of ancient rabbinic Jewry. In this paper I shall confine myself to examining a problem of no more than minuscule, local, toponomastic interest in early Byzantine Egypt. I shall argue that even what is obviously a mistake in a rabbinic source may, in one way or another, contribute to our knowledge.

Few things are as certain about Jewish attitudes to liturgical arrangements in the late biblical period and in proto-rabbinic Judaism as the exclusive attachment to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple was not only the primary centre of divine worship but the one place in which sacrifices could be offered. It was strictly and strenuously distinguished from pagan and sectarian cult locations, the more so if the latter pretended to be authentically Jewish like, for instance, the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim.¹ Pagan gods, even though they might have a special connexion

¹ This was destroyed, according to Josephus, by John Hyrcanus, apparently in 129/8 B.C. See Josephus, *AJ* 13. 254 ff.; cf. Megillat Ta'anit, cap. IX sub 21 Kislew. See also E. Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* I (4th ed., Leipzig 1901) 264 (Engl. tr.: G. Vermes and F. Millar [edd.], *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus*

with a particular, perhaps pre-eminent, shrine or place, would have temples and altars in many places. Not so the God of Israel: It was in Jerusalem that He had promised to dwell with His people forever, in Zion that there would be the habitation of His honour and the seat of His throne. And as God was jealous of other gods, so was He also jealous for Jerusalem, the abode He had chosen in which to set His name. No other place was worthy to be His dwelling.²

For the Persian period, we have, of course, the well-known papyrological sources concerning a temple at Elephantine near Syene (Assuan) in Upper Egypt.³ Of this temple we have no archaeological remains and it has left no traces in ancient literature. Our evidence indicates that it was used by the small military colony of Aramaic-speaking Jews and their families; but it cannot have had any more than local significance.

In the Hellenistic period the evidence for Jewish shrines outside Jerusalem is meagre. Apart from the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim mentioned above and the temple of Onias in Egypt, the location of which is the subject of this paper, recent work enables us to conclude that substantial literary or archaeological information about Jewish shrines outside Jerusalem is practically non-existent.⁴

Two sites are principally concerned, at Lachish and at 'Arâq el-Emîr. The so-called Solar Temple at Lachish, which Aharoni had thought was a Hellenistic structure used for Jewish cult purposes, probably was, in the Hellenistic period, not a Jewish sanctuary at all;⁵ it therefore need not detain us here any further.

Christ, 175 B.C. – A.D. 135 I [Edinburgh 1973] 207). We learn from Josephus, *AJ* 12. 257 ff., and from II Maccabees 6. 2 that the temple had already in 167/6 B.C., at the request of the Samaritans themselves (but see on this Alt, quoted by Habicht; see below), been consecrated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes to the cult of Zeus Xenios; cf. R. Marcus in LCL Josephus, VII 132–35. See also C. Habicht in 2. *Makkabäerbuch*, Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit, Bd. I, Lieferung 3 (Gütersloh 1979) 229, ad loc., and literature there cited.

² See, e.g., Jer. 3. 17, 17. 12, Ez. 43. 7–9, Joel 4. 17, 4. 21, Zach. 2. 14–15, 8. 3, Ps. 26. 8, 74. 2, 132. 13–14, 135. 21, Neh. 1. 9, I Chr. 23. 25, II Chr. 6. 6 ff. For the general tendency in the Hebrew Bible to confine the sacrificial cult to one place, cf. Dt. 12. 5 ff., 11–14, 18, Jos. 22. 10 to end of chapter. And see Philo, *Spec. leg.* 1. 67, Josephus, *Ap.* 2. 193 (see on this especially the note ad loc. by J. G. Müller, *Des Flavius Josephus Schrift gegen den Apion* [Basel 1877; repr. Hildesheim–New York 1969] 314) and *AJ* 4. 200–01.

³ E. Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka in einer jüdischen Militärkolonie zu Elephantine* (Leipzig 1911); A. E. Cowley, *Jewish Documents of the Time of Ezra* (London 1919); idem, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford 1923); E. G. H. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (New Haven 1953); B. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley 1968); for a fuller bibliography see *EJ* VI 610.

⁴ See, e.g., E. F. Campbell, Jr., "Jewish Shrines of the Hellenistic and Persian Periods," in F. M. Cross (ed.), *Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research, 1900–1975* (Cambridge, MA 1979) 159–67 and literature quoted there.

⁵ See for this Campbell (previous note) 166.

Excavations at 'Arâq el-Emîr in Jordan have uncovered what some scholars⁶ have thought to be the remains of an unfinished temple built by one of the Tobiads, Hyrcanus the son of Joseph, in the second century B.C. The arguments adduced do not seem to be convincing; but in any case, even if we accepted the dating and the identification of the structure as a temple we should still have to ponder the relationship of this building to one that is mentioned by Josephus (*AJ* 12. 230; see Campbell 162–63) as having been built by that same Hyrcanus and called a “fortress,” βᾶρις ἰσχυρά. It was pointed out long ago by Arnaldo Momigliano that the Tobiads had, even in the Persian period, been hostile to Jerusalem; that the βᾶρις had been in existence as early as the third century; and that its construction should be attributed not to Hyrcanus in the second century but to another Tobiad, a contemporary of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (regn. 285–46).⁷ The unreliability of Josephus or his source⁸ in this matter, combined with the weakness of the archaeological evidence, allows us to discount, in any inquiry on Jewish shrines outside Jerusalem in the period of the Second Commonwealth, the case made for the existence of a Jewish temple at 'Arâq el-Emîr.⁹ There is no need to conclude (with Campbell 163) from the evidence that “the building must have been used by Jews if a Tobiad built it, and furthermore it probably had more than purely local significance.” It is indeed interesting that Campbell refers (*ibid.*) to the likelihood that “vestiges of the old Tobiad-Samaritan association persisted.” But it is not clear why Campbell is so certain that in this region “there must have been a large number of Jews increasingly disenchanted with the Jerusalem temple and politically opposed to the Jerusalem alignments, for whom the 'Arâq temple would have become the religious center.” We have nothing here that could strengthen an argument purporting to show that there were in the Hellenistic period any significant Jewish shrines in the Palestinian region outside Jerusalem.

We come now to the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. From the point of view of mainstream Judaism the building of that temple must have signalled the separation of the Samaritans from the people of God. This judgment is supported both by explicit rabbinic statements and by historical

⁶ See Campbell (above, note 4) 162–64 for details and literature; for other, earlier, scholars who have identified the structure on the site as a temple, see Momigliano, *Quinto contributo* (next note) 605 with notes.

⁷ “I Tobiadi nella preistoria del moto maccabaico,” *Atti della Reale Accademia delle Scienze di Torino* 67 (1931–32) 165–200 = *Quinto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* I (Rome 1975) 597–628.

⁸ See on this also D. Gera, “On the Credibility of the History of the Tobiads,” in A. Kasher, U. Rappaport and G. Fuks (edd.), *Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel* (Jerusalem 1990) 21–38, esp. 24 f. and nn. 15 f.

⁹ Even were one to assume that at some time in the early Hellenistic epoch there existed a “Jewish” temple on the site of 'Arâq el-Emîr, there can be no doubt that it would have been a dissident temple; see Momigliano, *Quinto contributo* (above, note 7) 606.

parallels. We are told in Massekhet Kuttim, cap. II, *ad fin.*, that it is by giving up their attachment to Mount Gerizim that the Samaritans can gain re-admission to the fold,¹⁰ and we are, I submit, entitled to compare Samaritan separatism (as exemplified in the building of their own temple) to the hostility of the Qumran sectarians towards the Temple in Jerusalem. It was this, rather than their idiosyncratic messianic and apocalyptic doctrines, that marked the latter off as sectarians who would in the end sever themselves from the community of the House of Israel.¹¹ The temple on Mount Gerizim was the clearest possible monument to the separation of the Samaritans from the body of the Jewish people.

In view of the strong evidence for the concentration of the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem it is all the more noteworthy that at the very time of the religious and national re-awakening associated with the resistance to Seleucid rule in Palestine there existed a Jewish temple in Egypt established by a member of the high-priestly family descended from Simon Justus. This temple was founded, in the second century B.C., under Ptolemy VI Philometor (c. 186–45; regn. 180–45) by a son of the High Priest Onias III. This man is conventionally referred to as Onias IV, although he did not, in fact, serve as High Priest in Jerusalem.¹² He had fled to Egypt (c. 162–60) for reasons which are not wholly clear. Josephus reports fear of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes.¹³ Tcherikover suggests the enmity towards Onias of Jewish hellenizers in Jerusalem as motivating his flight.¹⁴ According to rabbinic accounts, his flight was occasioned by an intra-family feud about the succession to Onias III.¹⁵ In Egypt Onias was hospitably

¹⁰ סאימתי סקבלין אותם? משכפרו בהר גריזים והודו בירושלים וכי.

¹¹ We must not be misled by the romanticising, archaeology-fed nostalgia and enthusiasm aroused by the discoveries in the Judean desert into thinking that the sectarians there were authentically Jewish. They had strong Jewish roots, like the Samaritans and the Christians; like both these offshoots of Second Commonwealth Judaism they developed intense enmities to the normative stream of the religion of Israel. Since we have gained from these discoveries so much that enriches our knowledge of the period as well as a good deal of literature written in the ancient language of the Jews, we tend, sometimes unthinkingly, to adopt these sectarians as authentically Jewish and to forget that they were inveterate heretics and enemies of the Jerusalem establishment.

¹² See on this, e.g., V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia 1959; repr. New York 1970) 276 ff. and M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* I (Jerusalem 1974) 405 f.; but see also B. Schaller, "Onias," in *Der Kleine Pauly* IV (Munich 1979) 303–04; Schaller, like some other scholars before him, argues that the Onias who founded the temple in Leontopolis was Onias III, and that Onias IV may never have existed ("ist wahrscheinlich eine fingierte Grösse").

¹³ Josephus, *BJ* 1. 33, 7. 423, *AJ* 12. 387. Antiochus IV had died in 164/3. In the *BJ*, though not in the *AJ*, Josephus may have been thinking of Onias III; see Tcherikover (previous note) 276.

¹⁴ See Tcherikover, *CPJ* I (1957) 2, who, however ([above, note 12] 44), points out that Onias IV may himself have been a hellenizer in spite of his opposition to the hellenistic party in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ PT Yoma 43d and BT Menahot 109b ff.

received by Ptolemy and Cleopatra, who granted him some land in the nome of Heliopolis. There he founded a military colony for Jewish settlers and a temple for their use. These settlers may have come with him from Palestine or he may have raised a Jewish military force after his arrival in Egypt; indeed he may have founded the colony and the temple as late as 145 B.C., shortly before Ptolemy's death.¹⁶ There is no foundation for the suggestion that Ptolemy Philometor intended to found a cultic centre for the Jews in the Delta to counterbalance the importance and attraction of the temple in Jerusalem,¹⁷ and there is no evidence whatsoever that the temple of Onias had at any time more than merely local significance.¹⁸ The temple at Leontopolis existed until after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem; it was demolished on the orders of Vespasian in A.D. 73.¹⁹

Apart from the rabbinic references (see below), our main source for the history of Onias and his temple is Josephus.²⁰ The temple is never mentioned by Alexandrian writers and it seems that Egyptian Jewry was not much interested in this Palestinian immigrant foundation.²¹

We have a number of rabbinic reports referring to the shrine of Onias.²² These regularly describe the temple of Onias as בית חוניו. The word בית, though it does not univocally = temple, naturally is capable of being used in a phrase referring to a temple; cf., e.g., בית אלוהים, בית ה',

¹⁶ See Tcherikover (above, note 12) 279 f.

¹⁷ H. Kees, "Ὀνίου," *RE* XVIII.1 (Stuttgart 1939) 477–79.

¹⁸ This should be weighed in any consideration of the argument put forward by A. Momigliano (*Aegyptus* 12 [1932] 161–72, and esp. 170–71) that there existed or that there may have existed a Greek translation of the Old Testament in the Temple of Leontopolis different from the Septuagint; that this version ("accolta o curata dai sacerdoti leontopolitani") was circulating in Egypt in competition with the LXX; and that the legend of the Greek translation of the Bible propagated by the author of the *Letter of Aristeas* had a polemical purpose directed against the Leontopolitan temple. I know of no evidence that would support any part of this argument. In any case, it is to be noted that Momigliano relies not only on a fairly late date for the work of Ps.-Aristeas but, more seriously, on what seems to me a vastly inflated estimate of the importance of the Leontopolis temple; we cannot even say that the population for whom this temple was built was Greek-speaking rather than Aramaic-speaking; for all we know they spoke Egyptian. Though there is evidence that the Greek Bible was read in the countryside in the second century B.C., it seems clear on the whole that the Jews living in the *chora* were assimilating fast to their Egyptian-speaking neighbours. See Tcherikover, *CPJ* I (1957) 43–46.

¹⁹ Josephus, *BJ* 7. 421.

²⁰ *BJ* 1. 33, 7. 421–36, *AJ* 12. 387–88, 13. 62–73, 285, 20. 236, *Ap.* 2. 5. 2 f. On the problems that arise from a collation of these passages, see Tcherikover (above, note 12) 275 ff. et alibi, e.g., 392 ff.

²¹ We may disregard *Sibylline Oracles* 5. 501, 507, where some scholars have seen an allusion to the temple of Onias; see Tcherikover (above, note 12) 499 n. 28 and, more generally, idem in *CPJ* I (1957) 20 f. and 44 ff., with notes (and literature cited in his n. 117) and idem, *Jews and Greeks in the Hellenistic Period* (Tel Aviv 1963) 220 ff. and nn. (Hebrew). Cf. P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972) I 83 with nn. 301 ff. (in vol. II, pp. 162 f.).

²² Mishna Menahot 13. 10, PT Yoma 43d, BT Menahot 109a ff., BT Megilla 10a, BT AZ 52b.

בית המקדש. For בְּחֻנִּיּוֹ (ח) we sometimes find the spelling בְּחֻנִּיּוֹ (ך).²³ Interestingly, where the actual construction of the temple is reported, the word מִזְבֵּחַ = altar is used, thus making it quite unmistakable that the reference is to a foundation meant to be used for the performance of sacrifices.²⁴ Similarly, Josephus speaks of the temple as a ναός or ναός and ἱερὸν; and in the same context he refers to Isaiah 19. 19 f. as predicting the κατασκευὴ τοῦδε τοῦ ναοῦ.²⁵ Isaiah actually has there בְּיוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. It is interesting that this same passage is quoted also in both Talmudim, in the same context.²⁶ The LXX translates מִזְבֵּחַ correctly as θυσιαστήριον, and Josephus, too, knows that text: ἔσται θυσιαστήριον ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ Κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ (AJ 13. 68). A few paragraphs earlier (AJ 13. 64) Isaiah is said to have foretold that a ναός would be built in Egypt. Occasionally Josephus mentions a βωμός.²⁷

There can be no doubt that both the rabbinic sources and Josephus are speaking about a temple, i.e. a cult place in which sacrifices were performed, not merely a meeting house for prayer and study, i.e. a synagogue.²⁸

The temple of Onias is known to us as having been located at Leontopolis. Josephus mentions Leontopolis (in the nome of Heliopolis), by that name, only in AJ 13. 65, in Onias' petition addressed to Ptolemy VI Philometor and Cleopatra, and in 13. 70, in the sovereigns' reply. The other passages in the works of Josephus refer only to the nome of Heliopolis without further specification of the place. The repetition of the phrase containing the place-name in the royal reply to the petition simply conforms to what is a natural feature of chancery style, namely to repeat the formulations contained in the original petition. We are thus left with what is, in effect, a single occurrence of the name Leontopolis.²⁹ Now, it is

²³ Cf., e.g., PT Yoma 43d.

²⁴ PT Yoma 43d and BT Menahot 109b.

²⁵ E.g. BJ 7. 424, 431 and 432.

²⁶ Above, note 24.

²⁷ AJ 13. 72: Onias built ἱερὸν καὶ βωμὸν τῷ θεῷ. Compare also BJ 7. 428.

²⁸ Fraser's repeated references to a "synagogue" at Leontopolis–Tell el-Yahoudiyah ([above, note 21] I 83, II 162–63 nn. 302 and 306) must be due to a *lapsus calami*; the point is that a synagogue is not a temple: The two serve different functions and have always had a different status from each other. This confusion is found also in the index (but not in the text or in the English original) of the French translation of E. R. Bevan's *Histoire des Lagides* (Paris 1934) 438. In rabbinic literature I know of only one passage in which it appears that the writer has confounded a synagogue with a temple: In the late מדרש עשר גלויות (version II), published by A. Jellinek in *Bet ha-Midrash* (3rd ed., repr. Jerusalem 1967) V 113–16 (see 115 and also [version I] IV 135), the language used is unmistakably conflated with that of the famous description of the great Alexandrian synagogue in Tosefta Sukka 4. 6 et alibi (see below, note 31); the author mentions an altar (in Alexandria) and speaks of sacrifices being performed there.

²⁹ The correspondence quoted by Josephus is generally regarded as a Hellenistic forgery: see Tcherikover (above, note 12) 499 n. 30, who, though for a different purpose and in a different context, rightly notes that even a forged document may contain some kernel of

interesting that those rabbinic sources that do name the location of the Onias temple speak of it as having being located in *Alexandria*.³⁰ The Rabbis are certainly not confusing the בית חורני with the Alexandrian Synagogue which is mentioned elsewhere in talmudic literature;³¹ on the contrary, in a number of passages they make it quite clear that they understand that the Onias foundation was a *temple*, a cult place in which sacrifices were performed, and we even find the opinion expressed that, whatever the status of that temple may have been, it was not an idolatrous temple, and some of the sacrificial acts performed there were, under certain circumstances, to be regarded as valid.³² It is thus inconceivable that the Rabbis might have confused the temple with the Alexandrian Synagogue.

On the other hand, though the possibility of a simple mistake concerning the location of the temple arising from guesswork or ignorance cannot be discounted, it is certainly possible that the Rabbis drew on their own contemporary knowledge that Leontopolis was in the early Byzantine age an alternative designation for Alexandria.³³ The equation Leontopolis = Alexandria lends itself to confusion in both directions.

We are told by Stephanus of Byzantium (fl. probably c. 528–35) that “Alexandria was called Rhakotis, and Pharos, and Leontopolis . . .” Similarly, Eustathius of Thessalonike (12th century) reports that Leontopolis was one of a number of alternative names for Alexandria.³⁴

historical truth; thus, the *name* Leontopolis may well be correct. In any case, there seems to be no doubt about the reliability of the references to the location of the temple in the Heliopolitan nome, and it is generally accepted that the Onias temple was in fact located in the countryside, quite possibly at a place to be identified with the modern Tell el-Yehūdīyeh, at a distance of ca. 30 miles NE of Memphis. See R. Marcus on Josephus, *AJ* 13. 65 (LCL VII 258–59), with the literature there quoted, esp. Schürer (above, note 1) 3rd ed., III (1898) 97 ff. with note 25 (Engl. tr.: III.1 145 f., esp. n. 33).

³⁰ PT Yoma 43d, BT Menahot 109b.

³¹ Tosefta Sukka 4. 6, BT Sukka 51b, PT Sukka 5. 1 = 55 a–b; cf. S. Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer* (Berlin–Vienna 1922) 261 ff., 336.

³² See, e.g., Mishna Menahot 13. 10, BT Menahot 109a–b, BT AZ 52b, BT Megilla 10a.

³³ RE s.v. “Leontopolis 10” and A. Calderini, *Dizionario dei nomi geografici e topografici dell’Egitto greco-romano* I (Cairo 1935) 58.

³⁴ *Stephani Byzantii Ethniconum quae supersunt ex recensione Augusti Meinekii* I (Berlin 1849; repr. 1958) 70: “Ἀλεξάνδρεια πόλις ὀκτωκαίδεκα. πρώτη ἡ Αἰγυπτία ἦτοι Λίβυσσα, ὡς οἱ πολλοί, ἀπὸ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Φιλίππου. Ἰάσων δὲ ὁ τὸν βίον τῆς Ἑλλάδος γράψας ἐν δ’ βιβλίῳ φησὶ “τὸν μὲν οὖν τόπον τῆς πόλεως ὄναρ ἐχρησιμοτοῦσθαι οὕτως

νῆσος ἔπειτά τις ἔστι πολυκλύστῳ ἐνὶ πόντῳ
Αἰγύπτου προπάρειθε, Φάρον δὲ ἐκικλήσκουσιν.
(Homer, *Od.* 4. 354 f.)

ἐκέλευσε δὲ διαγράψειν τὸ σχῆμα τοὺς ἀρχιτέκτονας· οὐκ ἔχοντες δὲ λευκὴν γῆν ἀλφίτοις διέγραφον, ὄρνιθες δὲ καταπτάντες τὰ ἄλφιστα αἴφνης διήρπασαν. παραχθείς οὖν Ἀλέξανδρος (sic) οἱ μάντιες θαρρεῖν ἔλεγον· πάντων γὰρ τὴν πόλιν τροφὸν γενήσεσθαι.” ταῦτα καὶ Ἀρριανός. ἐκλήθη δὲ Ῥακώτις καὶ Φάρος καὶ Λεοντόπολις διὰ τὸ τὴν τῆς Ὀλυμπιάδος γαστέρα ἐσφαργίσθαι λέοντος εἰκόνι. Cf. Apian, *Anab.* 3. 1–2, Plut. *Alex.* 2.

Eustathius clearly draws, directly or indirectly, on Stephanus of Byzantium (or his source?).³⁵ It is thus evident that we have here not two testimonia but what is in fact one. Such papyrological evidence as we have consists of the single letter *lambda* in a fourth-century papyrus, where we read εἰς τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἦτοι Λ[εοντόπολιν].³⁶ It is manifest that this reading of the papyrus, so far from establishing or confirming the identification of Alexandria with Leontopolis, is itself based on that identification.³⁷

The evidence for the alternative name of the great city is thus seen to be extremely meagre; but if the Rabbis indeed confused Alexandria with Leontopolis this very confusion, though leading them into error, would paradoxically enable us to see in it a further piece of evidence, both for the use of Leontopolis as an alternative name for Alexandria and for the placing of the Oniad temple in Leontopolis (the latter, as we have seen, attested otherwise only by Josephus, *AJ* 13. 65–70). Since our Greek evidence is so poor on both these points any additional evidence from rabbinic sources is to be welcomed, more especially as our talmudic texts are completely independent of the Byzantine tradition. We must, of course, remember that neither the Jerusalem Temple nor that of Onias at Leontopolis existed any longer at the time the Rabbis discussed the sacrifices performed there. Their discussions are thus purely academic, and though they will have been nourished by plentiful and zealously preserved information about the activities of the Jerusalem priesthood, they cannot have drawn on more than scattered memories of the Oniad foundation. Hence, since in their period Leontopolis was known to be an alternative name for Alexandria, the great city with its vastly numerous Jewish population, any fleeting memory of the name Leontopolis in connexion with the temple of Onias, or any mention in

4–5. My colleague Dr. Deborah Gera has reminded me of Herodotus 6. 131, where a somewhat similar motif occurs in a story concerning the mother of Pericles; cf. Plut. *Per.* 3. 2.

Eustathius (C. Müller [ed.], *Geographi Graeci Minores* II [Paris 1882] 261) writes on the words Μακεδόνιον πολίεθρον (which appear in the text of Dionysius Periegetes, line 254 = *Geographi Graeci Minores* II 116): ὁ ἔστιν ἡ τοῦ Μακεδόνα Ἀλεξάνδρον ὁμώνυμος πόλις, ἐν ἣ καὶ ἐτάφη . . . ἀριθμοῦνται δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις Ἀλεξάνδρειαι ὑπὲρ τὰς δεκαοκτώ. τούτων μία καὶ αὕτη, πόλις Λίβυσσα ἦτοι Αἰγυπτία. ταύτην δὲ καὶ ἄλλοις μὲν ὀνόμασι διαφόροις κληθῆναι φασί ποτε, ὀνομασθῆναι δὲ καὶ Λεοντόπολιν διὰ τὸν τῆς Ὀλυμπιάδος καὶ τοῦτο Ἀλεξάνδρον (?), ἥς ἡ γαστήρ ἐσφραγίσθαι λέοντος εἰκόνι λέγεται, κ.τ.λ. For the possible sources of Stephanus, for the question why the great city was called Leontopolis, and for related matters, see C. Müller (ed.), *Pseudo-Callisthenes* (Paris 1865) xix f., with notes; also C. Müller (ed.), *Scriptores Alexandri Magni* (Paris 1865) 160 (Iason Argivus, fr. 2).

³⁵ We have only an epitome, dating from between the sixth and the tenth centuries, of the *Ethnica*; it has been suggested (J. F. Lockwood in *OCD* s.v. "Eustathius") that Eustathius may in fact draw in his commentary on the complete text of Stephanus. R. Browning in the same work (2nd ed., p. 1012) suggests that Eustathius used the surviving epitome of the *Ethnica*.

³⁶ *Pap. Oxy.* 1660, line 2, in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* XIV (London 1920) 114–15.

³⁷ The reading Λ[εοντόπολιν], though attractive and quite possibly right, does not by necessity impose itself and is not universally accepted: see P. J. Sijpesteijn, "Notes on Two Papyri," *ZPE* 87 (1991) 257–58, who suggests εἰς τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἦτοι λιμένα μέγαν τοῦ Εὐνόστου].

on the other hand identify אַלכסנדריא anachronistically with Alexandria: אַלכסנדריא.⁴⁰

Both the Greek and the Syriac traditions have preserved the memory of the multiplicity of places called Alexandria: Stephanus of Byzantium (above, note 34): Ἀλεξάνδρειαι πόλεις ὀκτωκαίδεκα (cf. Eustathius of Thessalonike [above, note 34]: ... ἀριθμοῦνται δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις Ἀλεξάνδρειαι ὑπὲρ τὰς δεκάοκτώ).⁴¹ For Syriac, see Payne Smith, col. 209, s.v. אַלכסנדריא for two towns called Alexandria: אַלכסנדריא = the city in Egypt and אַלכסנדריא זעורתא = Alexandretta (Iskenderun).

It is also the case that, occasionally, Alexandria, in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic (both Jewish and Christian), may refer to the whole land of Egypt, or, rather, may stand for it, *pars pro toto*. Thus, Payne Smith (ibid.) also cites the use in Syriac of the name Alexandria *pro tota Aegypto*. Similarly, in Lamentations Rabba 1. 5. 246 (p. 65 Buber) it seems easy to understand אַלכסנדריא as referring to the commander of the troops from Egypt as a whole and not only of those from Alexandria. So also, one may want to read in Tosefta Nidda 4. 17 אַלכסנדריא גלופטא (= הליאופטא) instead of אַלכסנדריא of the older editions, or instead of אַלכסנדריא or of יונוניא in the parallel passages (both in BT Nidda 30b: אַלכסנדריא גלופטא = הליאופטא and, on the same page, יונוניא גלופטא = הליאופטא); or instead of אַלכסנדריא as read by Zuckerman (p. 645).⁴²

Note also that Rashi on BT AZ 8b (בימי הליאופטא) writes, citing the passage in BT Nidda 30b, של אַלכסנדריא כדאמר, בהפלת במסכת נדה. This suggests either the ease with which the place-name Alexandria insinuates itself into such a context or the possibility that Rashi read a text different from that in our printed editions.

But all this does not, in the end, affect our problem: One is not surprised that Alexandria may, as is so often the case elsewhere, stand for the country of which it is the chief city;⁴³ nor that its name may be applied confusedly and thus wrongly, because of the great number of places that bear the same name. What is argued here is simply that the confusion that we are dealing with is of a peculiar kind, namely that occasionally the name Alexandria, in our rabbinic sources, comes in place of another name which

⁴⁰ See Pesikta 63b, with Buber's note ad loc., Pesikta Rabbati, cap. 17, p. 87a and see also p. 156b (Friedmann-[Ish Shalom]), Gen. R. 1. 1 (p. 1 Theodor/Albeck), Targum to Ezekiel 30. 14-16, Targum to Jeremiah 46. 25, Targum to Nahum 3. 8.

⁴¹ RE has twenty-one entries for places called Alexandria.

⁴² Such confusions are easy in our sources: Thus in Seder Olam Rabba some editions are said (see Krauss, *Lehnwörter* I 55, s.v. אַלכסנדריא) to have in chapter 30 the spelling אַלכסנדריא for the proper name אַלכסנדריא.

⁴³ Cf., in Arabic, Misr for Egypt and also for its capital; similarly al-Shām for Syria and its capital. See also Syriac מִסְרִיָּן, which is used both for the whole of Egypt and for any city which may at any given time be its capital, e.g. Fustāt (Old Cairo) or Alexandria.

is itself, in the early Byzantine age, an alternative name of the Ptolemaic capital.

Considered by themselves the points made here are small and perhaps insignificant. Nonetheless, if I am right in suggesting that the confusion of the Rabbis arose out of the fact that Alexandria was also called, in their time, Leontopolis, this would make it unnecessary to suspect the Rabbis of completely uninformed guesswork. This alone would be a conclusion of some value. But there is more: If the suggestion made here is indeed acceptable, then this would add strength to the confidence with which we expect to find in the recesses of rabbinic literature a good deal more such material. Handled with discretion and discrimination, this is likely to provide confirmation and corroboration of what we learn otherwise only through remarks dispersed here and there over pagan and Christian writings of antiquity and the early Byzantine age.

The Hebrew University, Jerusalem